



The Recycled Content Claims Toolkit

A practical guide to building clear, credible, and compelling consumer-facing recycled content claims.

Consumers are familiar with recyclability, but new [SPC research](#) shows they don't really understand recycled content. However, once consumers understand recycled content, it becomes the most important sustainability factor driving purchase intent.

In this resource, you'll find the tools you need to transform recycled content from a misunderstood packaging attribute into a compelling consumer benefit. Start with the do's and don'ts of recycled content claims:

THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF RECYCLED CONTENT CLAIMS

- | | |
|---|--|
| ✓ Educate consumers on what recycled content is, even consider using the definition | ✗ Don't assume consumers understand what recycled content means |
| ✓ Aim to at least hit the consumer sweet spot of 25% - 75% recycled content | ✗ Don't use the chasing arrows symbol for recycled content claims |
| ✓ Provide the exact percentage of recycled content, it's required by the Green Guides | ✗ Don't bother communicating recycled content that falls below 10% |
| ✓ Communicate color changes that occur when you use recycled content | ✗ Don't forget to verify your claims with your legal team when necessary |
| ✓ If recyclability isn't possible, aim for 67.5% recycled content to offset the trade-off | ✗ Don't lead with plastic reduction, it resonates less if consumers are still holding plastic* |
| ✓ Give claims room to shine, separating recycled content and recyclability on-pack | |
| ✓ Tell your unique story, narrative-based claims resonate most with consumers | |
| ✓ Support claims with third-party certifications that build trust and recognition | |
| ✓ Keep claims substantial – saving 100 trees is not substantial if you use 100,000 trees | |

The Plastics Caveat:

*Our research found an important risk when citing plastic reduction as the "impact" of packaging that is made from plastic. Even though your packaging may significantly reduce plastic waste, at the end of the day, the consumer's experience of holding plastic will be their most prominent takeaway.

The Three Types of Recycled Content Claims

Recycled content claims generally fall into three categories, each offering a different level of consumer engagement.

DATA-ONLY CLAIMS

This type of claim is exactly what it sounds like – it solely states the data part of the sustainable packaging attribute.

This package is made from 75% recycled content. *data*

VALUE-DATA CLAIMS:

A value-data claim directly states the percentage of recycled content while also providing broader context for the packaging attribute's sustainable benefits.

value
To conserve the natural environment, this package is made from 75% recycled content. *data*



NARRATIVE CLAIMS:

A narrative claim goes even further, creating a story around the sustainable packaging attribute. It ties the packaging's recycled content to a real-world sustainable impact that has already happened because of the actions that were taken to achieve that attribute.

data
By making this package out of 75% recycled content, we were able to conserve our planet's resources by saving, on average, 10 trees each year compared to the same package made with all new materials. *value impact*



Narrative claims resonate most with consumers.

They appeal to consumers' underlying values and demonstrate real-world impacts of recycled content at the critical moment when consumers make purchase decisions.

Purchasing packaging with recycled content lets consumers support concrete and complete acts of environmental stewardship, rather than relying on a recycling system beyond their control.



SPC RESEARCH

The Power of Recycled Content Claims

Why are recycled content claims so powerful?

A story illustrating that "good has already happened" resonates with consumers because it offers tangible, completed environmental benefits rather than promises of future recyclability that depend on complex infrastructure.

[Read the Research](#)

Formula for Creating Recycled Content Claims

Now that we've covered the different kinds of recycled content claims, let's dive into the formula for making a strong, narrative claim.

The Formula :

$$\text{Attribute} + \text{Impact} \times \text{Brand Identity} + \text{Emotions} = \text{Narrative Claim}$$

The Breakdown :



Understanding the Components:

What do attributes do?

The sustainable packaging attribute is the piece of quantifiable information that's being highlighted. With recycled content, the attribute could be anything from the amount of carbon sequestered from materials saved, to the percentage of recycled content used.

What does the impact communicate?

Impacts are the benefits seen from using recycled content. They can communicate that recycled content reduces waste, keeps materials out of landfills, and protects natural environments. Impacts can also be indirect, such as supporting job creation and the larger circular economy. Positive impacts that can be tied back to your brand's use of recycled content can be especially poignant.

Where does brand identity factor in?

Brands can leverage their established identity, voice, and tone to help consumers connect with their narrative claims. Is your brand focused on family traditions? Talk about how using recycled content helps preserve the resources and environments future generations depend on. The more your claim is tied to your brand, the more it will make sense to your consumers.

How can recycled content claims evoke emotions?

Consumers have strong emotional connections to nature and growing concern about packaging waste. Narrative claims are most compelling when they connect recycled content to something people care about, like protecting wildlife, preserving natural places, or reducing pollution. Pairing tangible impacts with emotional storytelling helps consumers connect with your packaging at the moment of purchase.

Examples of Recycled Content Claims

Attribute:

34% recycled content

Impact:

Respect for nature



Brand Identity:

Reliable, global paper packaging company

Emotions:

Performance, impact

Narrative Claim Messaging Foundation:

You might be noticing a slightly different color box. Well, behind every box is a tree. Those trees create migration paths and homes for animals. So we want to use less of them. By making our packaging with 34% previously used or repurposed materials, we save 20,000 trees a year when compared to the same package made with new materials. Those repurposed materials cause a little color change in our packaging, but we believe it's worth it. Because through responsible sourcing and material reuse, we help protect the habitats and resources we depend on every day.

What Goes On Pack:

Made with 34% recycled content.

You may notice our box has a slightly different color. That's because it's made with recycled paper, protecting 20,000 trees countless animals call home. We think that's a color worth celebrating.

Attribute:

75% recycled content

Impact:

Avoiding 50,000 pounds of excess waste



Brand Identity:

Sustainability forward, water brand with a casual tone

Emotions:

Protection, sincerity

Narrative Claim Messaging Foundation:

We love water. So do fish. We both share a love for pure water. That's why 75% of the materials in our bottles come from repurposed and reclaimed plastics, keeping the equivalent of 50,000 pounds of waste in use every year and out of landfills and our natural environments.

What Goes On Pack:

Made with 75% recycled content.

We love water. So do fish. This packaging uses recycled content to keep 50,000 pounds of waste out of landfills and marine ecosystems.



Build Your Own Recycled Content Claims

Attribute:

Impact:

Brand Identity:

Emotions:

Narrative Claim:

Attribute:

Impact:

Brand Identity:

Emotions:

Narrative Claim:



Appendix

ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF NARRATIVE CLAIMS

Attribute:

50% recycled content

Impact:

Protecting resources for future generations

Brand Identity:

Wholesome, family-oriented food company

Emotions:

Tradition, family values

Narrative Claim Messaging Foundation:

The best part of a meal is sharing it with others. We believe our packaging should share those values too. That's why this package is made with 50% previously used or repurposed materials. We're passing on the best version of our family recipes to our children and wasting less, saving 30,000 pounds worth of waste every year on average.

Attribute:

45% recycled content

Impact:

Streamlined packaging that reduces waste

Brand Identity:

Global eye health brand that provides daily essentials to help people see

Emotions:

Reliable, trustworthy

Narrative Claim Messaging Foundation:

Some things go unseen but make a big difference. Streamlining our packaging and using 45% repurposed and previously used materials is one of those changes we made. You probably didn't notice, and that was the point, but we want you to see the difference it's making. By using previously used materials, we reduce our need for new resources and keep 125,000 pounds of materials out of landfills each year. That's roughly 7 school buses worth of waste that won't be clogging up landfills every year. While you might not have noticed the difference, I bet you can envision that. Our promise to you is to help you see better in life and see better impacts from your purchase.

Attribute:

75% recycled content

Impact:

Keeping materials in circulation perpetually

Brand Identity:

Traditional CPG food company with essentials that come out of a can

Emotions:

Convenience, a piece of every meal

Narrative Claim Messaging Foundation:

Life is busy. You don't need one more thing to worry about. Our products are built on delivering quality meals and meal components as quick as you can crack a can. That same consideration applies to the can you're holding right now. Steel food cans are infinitely recyclable, which means that it's possible to reuse and repurpose those previously used materials into 75% of this can. In fact, every time you choose one of our products, you help keep 200,000 pounds of these valuable materials in circulation every year. And one day, your kids might be holding a can that includes a piece of the very one you used to feed them.

PUBLISHED

June 2026

AUTHORS

Alex Wade, Copywriter, ERM Shelton
Paula Leardini, Project Manager SPC, GreenBlue

RESEARCH

ERM Shelton

EDITORS

MK Moore, Associate Director, MarComms, GreenBlue
Olga Kachook, Director, SPC, GreenBlue



GreenBlue is an environmental nonprofit on a mission to accelerate the transition to a regenerative, just, and sustainable materials economy. We serve that mission through our members, providing them with the trustworthy and compelling information they need to prioritize progress across the entire value chain.

The Sustainable Packaging Coalition (SPC), a trademark project of GreenBlue, is a membership-based collaborative that believes in the power of industry to make packaging more sustainable. As the leading voice on sustainable packaging, our mission is to catalyze actionable improvements to packaging systems while lending an authoritative voice on packaging sustainability challenges.



Projects
of
GreenBlue

